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Each member can send questions, answers to questions, opinions, and notes upon Theosophical subjects. When necessary, the various communications will be condensed by the editor. Members will be careful to write on only one side of the paper and to use black ink.

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FOR PARAGRAPHS UNDER THE WORD "ANS." THE EDITOR IS PERSONALLY RESPONSIBLE.

July, 1893.

QUESTION CCXLIV.

Does an individual when acting as an agent for Karma entail any Karmic consequences upon himself because of the acts thus committed?

Ans.—As Karma is the law of causation,—in other words, the law that every cause must have an effect, no act whatever, of any kind, is without result. We cannot do so simple a thing as toss away a pebble without setting in motion consequences; so that any and every act, those having no motive as well as those with deliberate purpose, those impelled by intent to vindicate right not less than those indifferent to it or hostile to it, must have a Karmic fruit.

But doubtless the querent means to ask whether a person consciously engaged in administering justice upon Karmic grounds thereby escapes generating Karma himself, being simply an instrument and not an originator. Much of this subject is treated in the number of *Theosophical Siftings* entitled "Topics in Karma", and cannot be gone over here. Many in-

herent and allied matters make the question too full for thorough exposition, but some thoughts may be offered for digestion.

1. It is no easy thing to make sure that one is really acting as an agent of Karma. Human motives are always complicated, and are especially difficult to separate when pure love of justice and a desire for personal satisfaction may commingle. Even that desire may be compounded of pleasure in vindication of abstract right and pleasure in punishment for individual annoyance. So that the ensuring of a wholly judicial purpose, free from alloy or color, is far from a simple process.

2. Yet none the less are there occasions when vindication of Karma is a direct duty, and when verification of a right spirit is practicable. As has been explained in the *Siftings* above referred to, social life is made possible only by the contribution of each individual in observing and enforcing proper social conduct. Suppression of bad manners, preservation of common rights, protection of property and personal freedom, often cause necessity for prompt action which is the just consequence of offense,—in other words, Karmic. And this is due not merely to oneself as the immediate sufferer, but that others may, through the check administered, be saved from like suffering, and the offender himself be held back from a habit sure to involve worse discipline. Such check, moreover, may be given in a perfectly judicial spirit, not as revenge or in wrath, but with the motive described. And the motive may be measurably assured when careful introspection proves that the satisfaction felt is not because personal injuries are avenged, or because there is delight in causing pain to an offender, but because of conviction that real justice demands the award, and because, also, the whole social order is thereby protected. When a calm-thoughted person clearly perceives that a wrong has been done, that he in the circumstances is the fitting person to inflict discipline for it, and that the infliction is in a spirit only of right and justice and social duty, the probabilities are that he is a true agent of Karma and should not hesitate to act.

3. No acts performed under stress of demonstrated duty can entail evil consequences upon the actor. Such are good

acts, and only good can rebound. Moreover, to suppose that the merit or demerit of a Karmic function depends upon the kind of feeling it excites in the recipient is an entire misapprehension of Karma. A. may deserve reward for a worthy deed, and B. may deserve punishment for an evil deed; C. may be the one whose duty it is, in the circumstances, to administer both. The fact that A. is pleased and B. displeased at the experience in no way affects the happy consequences to C., since those consequences are the result of duty done, and the recompense is for the duty, which duty has the same claim to recompense whether performed in the line of reward or of punishment. The Karmic quality is the same in the actor in either case, and so must be its Karmic result. Such unlike things as relieving a distressed worthy brother and knocking down a ruffian attacking a woman may be the lot of an excellent man within fifteen minutes of each other, yet each may be the obligation of the moment and each reap therefore the same Karmic reward. One must remember too that each of the supposed recipients had what he deserved, and that the giving of desert could hardly be followed in one case by good and in the other by evil. So that, from every point of view, the act of a Karmic agent—assuming the act to have been truly such and to have been properly executed—can incur only a good return.

4. If it could be supposed that the result to a Karmic agent was determined by the pleasure it produced, Judges of Criminal Courts would be among the most cursed of human beings. Yet we know that their functions tend directly to the preservation of human rights and liberties, and on every principle of sound reason deserve abundant reward in good. The test of theories in Karma, no less than in other departments of Theosophy, is, as has often been stated, in appeal to reason and the moral sense, and nothing which fails under that appeal can commend itself to good Theosophists any more than to good thinkers outside the T. S.

W. Q. J.—A great many of the things said by the Editor in the foregoing are very good, but I am compelled to differ from

him on the main point. And I may say that while the articles "Topics in Karma" are very well written, they do not by any means dispose of the question raised here. In the first place, the questioner assumes in the first ten words of the question that a human being sometimes is not an agent of Karma. According to my studies, and as I think inevitable according to the law of Karma, there is no time when a human being is not an agent of Karma, for in every act and thought we are carrying out Karma, making new Karma, suffering old Karma, or producing effects on other people, or all these together. This is clearly stated by the Editor in the first paragraph of his answer. So I take it that the questioner means to ask whether one is justified in attempting, of his own motion, to administer as judge, jury, and executioner, to another the effects of Karma. This is involved in the question, as well as whether any consequences are entailed upon a person so acting. Now the first paragraph of the Editor's answer stating clearly the law, it must follow that consequences are entailed upon some one in this supposed case of a person making himself a direct Karmic agent. Certainly both the actor in the case and the person to whom the punishment or reward is administered must have consequences entailed upon them, because the "Karmic agent" is the centre from which the action flows, and upon whom it must react, and the other person is the person who receives the present consequences. Merely to say to yourself that you are enforcing a right or administering what you conclude is punishment or reward does not absolve you from the consequences, whatever those may be. And those consequences will come to you in two ways. First, through your own attitude, and second, from what you set up in the other person. Involved in the first is a seemingly third possibility, which is, a possible violation by you through ignorance of a law of nature. For instance, if you assume to administer punishment, considering yourself a Karmic agent, it is more than possible that you are simply gratifying some old spite or ill-feeling, under the guise of a judicial enforcement of right or punishment for wrong. We see this possibility every day in those cases where a person, declaring himself to be impartial and judicial, administers on

the one hand to persons whom he does not particularly like punishment which he considers their just due, and withholds similar punishment from another person for whom he has such a regard that he fails to administer punishment, but exercises instead forgiveness and charity. This being a common human experience, does it not indicate that inasmuch as a person is through old Karmic likes and affinities led to be kind and charitable through what is called partiality, he may on the other hand, through old dislikes and antipathies, be led by a repulsion to administer punishment, when he might as well have exercised forgiveness? Each man, I think, can be left to himself to decide what is his duty in redressing wrong done to another, which redressing involves perhaps the punishment of a third. But in my opinion no one is wise who considers himself a Karmic agent for any purpose. Further, and overlooked by the Editor and apparently by the questioner, the term "Karmic agent" has a technical significance under which only certain persons are so considered; that is, the larger class of men are not Karmic agents, except in the mere sense that they are in the very act of life making or experiencing Karma in the mass. A few persons are what is known as "Karmic agents", that is, human beings who by a certain course of training and previous life have become concentrated agents for the bringing about of certain definite effects which are well foreseen by the trained and initiated seer. This is one of the declarations of the Initiates who are supposed to know about these matters, and therefore any person assuming to be a Karmic agent may possibly be assuming too much altogether, and be bringing himself within the range of laws which will operate upon him with ten-fold force in future lives. It is therefore more charitable, more wise, more kind, more theosophic to follow the words of Jesus, Buddha, and hosts of other Teachers which direct us to forgive our brother seventy times seven times, which tell us that charity covers a multitude of sins, and which warn us against the self-righteousness that might induce us to presume we have been raised up from the foundation of the world to correct abuses in other men's actions rather than to attend to our own duty.

QUESTION CCXLV.

If there are cyclical impressions of all kinds, good and evil, what shoula one do in a downcast impression? Should he cheer up and destroy such a state, or should he keep calm and reflect on the law of justice (Karma) and its works?

T. E. Karr.—The present writer frankly avows he does not know what a "down-cast impression" of a cyclic order may be. It sounds portentous and of evil omen, and the only wise way to meet such an untoward and distressing trend of destiny would appear to be that suggested by the questioner, namely, to bear a brave front, keep as cool as circumstances and individual temperament permit, meditating the while upon Karma or any congenial subject of an equally soothing and consolatory character "until this tyranny be overpast." But to "destroy such a state" would seem not a little hazardous, to say nothing of the superhuman force required for such an achievement, unless, after the manner of Christian Scientists and such like hopeful idealists, the meditated destruction proceed solely by an extreme concentration of thought and intensity of will power, and even then it might well be open to doubt whether the attempt would not prove wholly futile, the probable result on the cycle about equalling that of a united force of mind-workers projecting their thought on a slowing-up of our planet's rate through space.

The existence, however, of certain thought currents in the mental atmosphere of our world can hardly be questioned by such as have noted the rapid extension and almost simultaneous rise of kindred ideas in minds widely separated from or wholly uninfluenced by each other, as in the case of some great inventors, and likewise among many scientific discoverers. But it may well be doubted whether people generally are keyed to any responsive vibration with these subtle currents. If they were so attuned, one would not unnaturally look for new ideas to receive a heartier welcome than they ordinarily do, it being a truism of history that every new departure hitherto has been savagely challenged by the lovers of the old order, which does not seem to indicate any great degree of familiarity by the

world at large with the new theories, progressive systems, or incipient discoveries with which the universal thought-atmosphere is presumably at all times teeming. This being the case with ideas of a useful order, there is no immediate necessity for worrying ourselves over our possible susceptibility to anything so useless, and unprolific of good, as a "down-cast impression". Should our sensitiveness to the contents of the thought-medium increase to the extent of encouraging a fiend of this description to assail us, it will then be time enough to throttle the creature, each individual as he best may for himself, with what result to the impression or to the throttler must be left wholly to the force of the imagination to picture.

QUESTION CCXLVI.

Mr. Mead says on page 26 of September "Lucifer":—"There are two paths which lead to Nirvana, the selfish and the unselfish, the 'open' and the 'secret'." A man can attain to the knowledge and bliss of the Nirvanic state by keeping the former for his own selfish advantage, and he can gain the latter bliss at the expense of his fellows. I had previously supposed that a life of altruism was absolutely necessary to the attainment of that state. If it can be gained without laboring and suffering for others, and especially if they occupy a higher place, the "Buddhas of Compassion" being "lower in rank", then it would seem that the majority would prefer "their own selfish advantage" and act accordingly. We are taught here and now that the more we do for others the more rapidly we advance ourselves. Is this law changed or reversed when one has reached a certain plane of unfoldment?

W. Q. J.—It seems certainly correct for Mr. Mead to say that there are two methods of attaining Nirvana, one selfish and the other unselfish, but the word selfish here would designate really unselfishness among us. It refers to the refinement of selfishness in that a person is working by unselfish acts to obtain that which, in the end of all analysis, is selfish, because it is for the benefit of the person involved. But it never was taught that a man could obtain Nirvana by working for his own selfish

advantage as his motive, and he does not gain it at the expense of any one; therefore his selfishness in obtaining Nirvana, being at no one's expense, is of a very different quality from what we ordinarily call selfishness. As a matter of fact it is stated that at a certain point of development the highly spiritualized person may in a moment pass into Nirvana through an instantaneous personal desire to gain that state.

Ans.—If one carefully reads what has come from the Teachers respecting the true nature of Nirvana and the development of that character which alone can fit for and attain it, one may clearly see that the abolition of selfishness is both the goal desired and the means thereto. An aspirant progressively emancipates himself from the ties which bind to purely personal aims, gradually losing thought or care for self-indulgence, and widening in sympathy for universal good. He does not covet knowledge, perception, and power because they add to his personal possessions, but because they are in pursuance of the universal evolutionary scheme which comprehends him as well as all other human beings within its purview, and because with such an outfit he can more largely contribute to the general advance. There is vast difference between the spirit which says, "Nothing is so fine as power: I will submit to any discipline that will enable me to obtain it", and the spirit which says, "I wish unreservedly to conform to the plan of development decreed by the All-Wise: whatever it contains must be best: to take part in its aim of universal salvation and forget myself in so doing, using attainments only for others, is what I most desire". We are told that the former spirit finds its expression in Black Magic, the very essence of which is developed faculty for the sake of self-gratification; and that the latter finds its expression in White Magic, the essence of which is developed faculty for the sake of altruistic service.

As progress upon the Right-hand Path is made, the aspirant acquires ever larger possessions in wisdom and prerogative, but with them an expanded consciousness which takes in more and more of interest in and appreciation of outlying spheres of being. It is a constant approximation to that Nirvanic region

where the individual soul is fully united with the universal soul. At last there comes a time when the only remaining zone has been crossed and the culmination is at hand. The character has become selfless, ready for the selfless home. Of course Nirvana is in a sense a reward; yet it is rather the outcome, the congruous result, the natural crown, to the long evolution. The aspirant has a *right* to it which no one in the universe would gainsay, but the right has only come through fitness. To accept what is just, fit, congruous, unquestioned, earned can hardly be called selfish. That which is avowed to be the goal of the whole human family cannot properly be stigmatized as greedily seized if one of the family outstrips others in the common pilgrimage. Yet it is just at this point, we are told, that the sublimest of all sacrifices is proffered to the winner as his privilege, and the Great Renunciation opens as the chief of all. There is no moral or other obligation to forego a right which has been clearly won and fully justified, and an Adept who accepted it could not be faulted, even if he did not see fit to relinquish it because other men, having had equal opportunity with himself, had preferred other aims.

Where is it said that the Buddhas of Compassion are "lower in rank"? Certainly not in the *Voice of the Silence.*

QUESTION CCXLVII.

Can anything in the world of infinite causes be properly termed "trivial"?

Ans.—The infinitude of causes here is in their number, not in their individual value. Causes are without limit as to multitude, for the most insignificant, as well as the greatest, act of every living entity has effects, and each in its turn becomes a fresh cause. But their importance varies just as truly as the actors vary. Some are of far-reaching influence and affect the future of nations; others are so slight as barely to graze the immediate environment, and instantly disappear in the movement of larger and greater ones. The motiveless closing of a baby's fist in its cradle is not comparable to the signing by

Louis Napoleon of the declaration of war against Prussia. There are countless incidents in life just as unimportant, just as correctly described by the word "trivial".

A sense of proportion is no less needful in Theosophy than elsewhere. The constituent elements which go to make up life combine in varying proportions as truly as do those which form the inorganic compounds of chemistry; and as no chemical science would be possible which assumed that all atoms combined with equal value, so no science of life is possible on that assumption. There are a few great incidents in every man's career which tower above and throw their shadows upon all the rest; there is a multitude of minor acts which exemplify the character and mould its history; and there is almost an infinity of insignificant trifles which mean little or nothing and which produce as little. Of course only a Higher Intelligence, equipped with full knowledge of Karma and the Astral Light, could accurately guage each, but anybody can form an approximate estimate by running over his life and sifting what he remembers. From such a retrospect he could hardly infer all elements to have equal moment, since their results have not, and of course the causative force of these results must as truly differ. So, then, in individual as in national history causes have range in importance, and the distinctions may be perceived by observation.

This matter may not have much of moment in itself, but it brings up the whole subject of sense of proportion. Theosophy contemplates men and things in a light so different from the conventional that its earlier experience is apt to be towards exaggeration. When a man finds that his standards and beliefs and ideals have been altogether artificial, and that the actual facts in nature are widely opposed, he not unnaturally supposes that all his mind-processes are to be reversed if he is to be in touch with truth. The further he gets from the old system, the more likely to be close to the new. And so all accustomed thought becomes discredited, and propositions most antipodal to it and most repugnant to it appear presumably Theosophic. No doubt this tendency is fostered by indiscriminate deference to the sayings of those who are known to be advanced in Theoso-

phy. There is certainly a good deal in works of the highest repute which does not commend itself to dispassionate judgment, and sometimes assertion is used as if it was equivalent to argument or to proof. The view at times given of nature and progress sounds more like a fantastic invention than an accurate transcript, and it may well be lamented not only because of its certain effect upon scoffers but because of its probable effect on the credulous. There is no need to illustrate, for every intelligent Theosophist can recall assertions which disturbed him as marring matter otherwise so valuable. If no discrimination is used, this tendency of the neophyte to confound exaggeration with orthodoxy gains force, and then he never checks his new conceptions by any reference to reason, probability, or common sense. Doctrines as well as facts lose proportion; mental acumen becomes impaired; sacrifice of the judicial habit seems meritorious. This need not at all be the state of mind of the Questioner, but the Question sounds a little as if he was undergoing the early stage of a common experience.

A riper perception of real Theosophy brings one back from the reaction against conventionalism to the platform common to all intelligent seekers after truth. Prejudice has no place on it; but reason, analogy, sound discrimination, scientific tests, dispassionate judgment, sense of fitness and of proportion, even a sense of humor, have full play. Through the united action of these, Theosophists may properly hope to gain every truth distinctive to Theosophy, while simultaneously culturing that habit of mind which is essential to the acquisition of any truth at all. And one invaluable result will be that expositions of Theosophic truth will become rational, gaining plausibility not only from the arguments adduced, but from the evident mental equilibrium of the writers. Hostility is thus disarmed; a presumption of verity is created; the doctrines themselves win way. This is not an age when anything antecedently improbable meets greeting: still less will it secure it if associated with obvious fantasy: prepossessions can only be overborne by the strongest and clearest of treatment. Names count for little, authority for almost nothing; reason and the moral sense are final. If Theosophists will cultivate these they will anticipate

the sifting of time, and save to Theosophy decades of loss and thousands of adherents.

QUESTION CCXLVIII.

Have we Theosophists any magazine or periodical which treats only of psychic matters and gives reports of experiments? I don't see why we should not get what information we can on the second object of the T. S. But our leading members fight shy of those subjects, and many of them disapprove of investigation. Why should we be afraid of light?

Ans.—There are probably two main reasons why psychic studies are not much encouraged by our leaders. One is that attention to the higher, the spiritual, nature is so much more important and so much more productive; the other, that at this epoch the few Theosophists of leisure can perhaps be of greater service by prompting and helping the broader class of scientific investigators than by independently investigating. Mr. W. T. Stead, the famous editor of *The Review of Reviews*, has for a year or more turned his attention to this field, has enthusiastically published many facts and phenomena drawn from it, and has just announced the establishment of a new Quarterly to be called *Borderland* and to treat the whole matter scientifically. He purposes classes through England and America to work on prescribed lines and to report results for collation and publication, monographs by competent writers, and an intelligent, careful treatment of psychic phenomena. The subscription to the quarterly will be about $1.50. If Mr. Stead is as vigorous and as fair in this new undertaking as heretofore, and if he receives as much literary and other aid as his prospectus foretells, he will immensely push forward the increasing interest in these studies. And it may very well be that the outcome will not be merely an addition to the scientific treasury, but a demonstration that the facts are explainable only by Theosophy.

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